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AUTHOR Kean, Michael H.
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ABSTRACT

The International Association of Experimenting Schools for Adolescents is a "consortium of persons seeking to develop experimental schools which will facilitate the growth of adolescents capacities to live successfully in modernizing societies." Simultaneous with the development of the Association was a concern by its founders that an evaluation component be designed and installed to provide for a "dynamic diagnosis" of the system. Represented is a first attempt to think through the notion of evaluation as it might apply to the Association, to define the context upon which the evaluation will be installed, to consider problems related to design and instrumentation, and to anticipate those processes which will likely be necessary to integrate an evaluation plan into the regular operation of the Association and each of its member organizations. The purpose of evaluation will be briefly discussed, as will its specific uses in experimenting and/or alternative schools. Evaluation will be viewed in the context of development, with special attention being paid to the objectives and process of building a design. (Author)

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EVALUATING AN INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF EXPERIMENTING SCHOOLS: PROBLEMS AND PROCESSES

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Michael H. Kean
Executive Director

Office of Research and Evaluation
The School District of Philadelphia

INTRODUCTION

The International Association of Experimenting Schools for Adolescents is a "consortium of persons seeking to develop experimental schools which will facilitate the growth of adolescents capacities to live successfully in modernizing societies." Conceived less than three years ago, and having undergone continuous development since then on both sides of the Atlantic, the idea is no longer embryonic, but still is clearly in the very early stages of its formative existence.

Simultaneous with the development of the Association was a concern by its founders that an evaluation component be designed and installed to provide for a "dynamic diagnosis" of the system.

That which follows respresents a first attempt to think through the notion of evaluation as it might apply to the Association, to define the context upon which the evaluation will be installed, to consider problems related to design and instrumentation, and to anticipate those processes which will likely be necessary to integrate an evaluation plan into the regular operation of the Association and each of its member organizations.

The purpose of evaluation will be briefly discussed, as will its specific uses in experimenting and/or alternative schools. Evaluation will be viewed in the context of development, with special attention being paid to the objectives and process of building a design.

THE PURPOSE OF AN EVALUATION SYSTEM

The primary purpose of an evaluation system is to provide information to decision-makers for use in planning, programming, implementing, and recycling activities. Stufflebeam has defined evaluation as the collecting, organizing, analyzing, and reporting of timely, valid, and credible information. In this context it should be stressed than an evaluation syster must be an integral part of the operation of any experimenting school, and of an association designed to foster the growth of such schools.

In the United States, one is likely to be more familiar with the term "alternative schools" than "experimenting schools." Many so-called alternative schools are merely existing structures, updated by adding a few different course offerings. A true alternative program views the school itself as an experimental proposition. Experimenting schools, as defined by the Association, must be willing to confront the basic issue: how can schools be designed and operated to satisfy the needs of all young people to learn to live successfully and to participate fully in a modernizing society?" An alternative school which is developed to deal with this issue is the genuine article, and as such might be synonymous with an experimenting school.

One disadvantage of the term "experimenting," however, is its close association with the notion of laboratory research. Research creates new knowledge or adds to the existing base of knowledge. It need not create or add knowledge useful to a decision-maker, or to anyone, for that matter. Research has a place in the Association and each of its member organizations, but it is separate and apart from the need for an evaluation system.

One reason we know so little about whether, what, or why alternative schools have produced, is that those responsible for directing them have been loathe to allow evaluation to take place. This over-protectiveness is due largely to confusion between research and evaluation, and the feeling that what is occurring in an alternative school cannot be accurately reflected or understood by anyone other than an actual program participant. Some alternative school directors have been stung by insensitive researchers or evaluators and may be justified in their distrust, while others wish to keep their "experiments" pure from contamination for as long as possible. Whatever the reason, failure to provide for a system of evaluating an alternative school from the outset is a counter-productive move. Hickey, in his position paper on Evaluating Alternative Schools has listed four reasons why such evaluation is imperative:

1. Evaluation provides information related to internal program improvement, which, in turn, relates to the on-going planning process.

2. Evaluation serves as a basis for establishing the credibility of the school, which must meet the demands of a variety of "publics."

3. A primary rationale for the existence of most alternative schools is that they become the means of the process by which public education evolves.

4. Evaluation of student progress is difficult without an adequate understanding of where the program, itself stands.

In the original proposal for the creation of the Association, Sanders, Smilansky, and Coleman developed what they termed "dynamic diagnosis," as "a foundation for a helping system." They based their notion on the assumption that:

1. "...the evaluation would be a comprehensive, diversified, longitudinal process shared cooperatively by ...students,

teachers and tutors, administrators, and parents."

2. "...all participants in the school will share responsibility for establishing criteria, and developing and practicing diagnostic and evaluation designs."

3. "...there will be a system of diagnosis that will be supportive of persons in perceiving, reflecting, and decision-making..."

FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

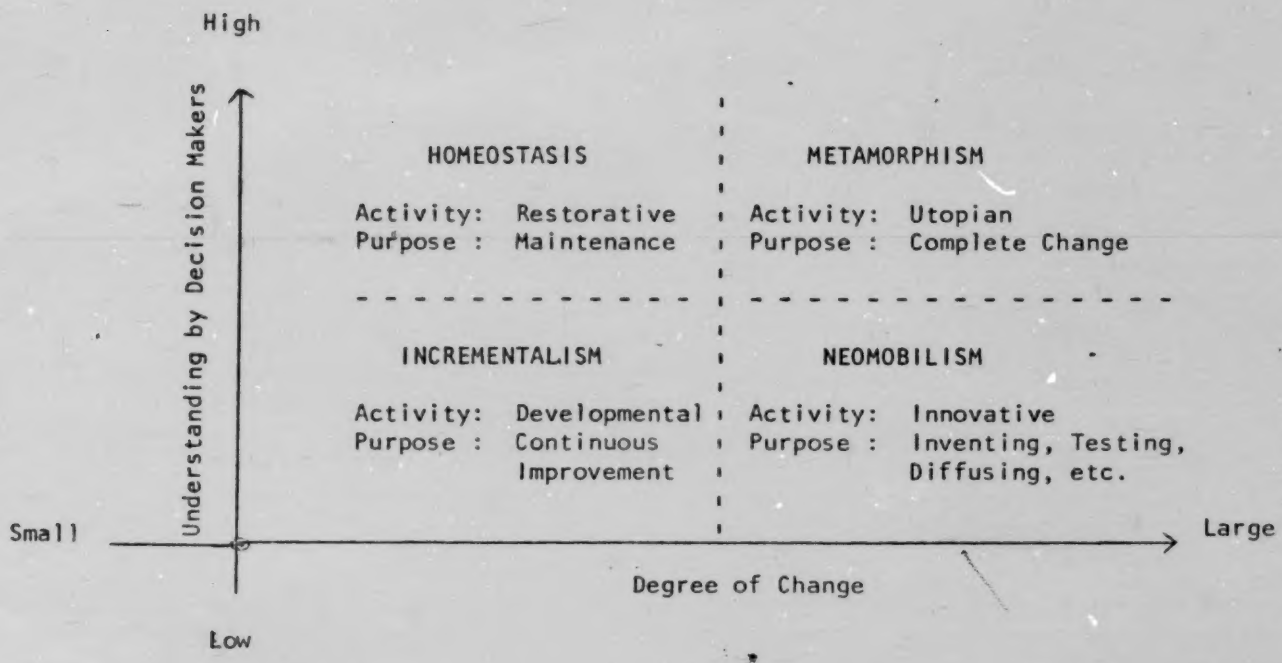
If the purpose of an evaluation system is to provide information upon which to base decisions, then the focus of an evaluation must be upon the decisions to be made. The Braybrooke and Lindblom model of public policy decision settings adapted to the educational milieu by Stufflebeam may serve as a useful vehicle for establishing the relationship between the Association and its evaluation system.

Braybrooke and Lindblom's model (Figure I) consists of an ordinate (Y) axis representing the level of understanding held by the decision maker, (the lowest point being the origin) and an abscissa (X) axis representing the degree of change expected to occur, (again, increasing in size as it moves away from the origin). Four basic decision settings are established: Homeostasis (Y high, X small); Incrementalism (Y low, X small); Metamorphism (Y high, X large); and Neomobilism (Y low, X high). In the homeostatic setting, the activity is restorative and the purpose is maintenance; in the incremental, the activity is developmental and the purpose, continuous improvement; in the metamorphic, the activity is utopian, the purpose, complete change; and in the neomobilistic setting, the activity is innovative and the purpose is to invent, test, diffuse, and eventually adopt certain findings.

In its present stage of development, the Association has moved into a neomobilistic decision setting. During an earlier period, while the document entitled School as an Experimental Proposition was being conceptualized and written, placement in the incremental setting might have been more appropriate. At that time, the set of propositions upon which the Association was to be built was being developed and undergoing continuous refining. Now, however,

- FIGURE 1 -

Braybrooke and Lindblom's Model of Decision Settings



these propositions have been established, and the formal founding of the Association has signalled the beginning of planned change (innovation), the purpose of which is to develop (invent) strategies based upon the accepted set of propositions, test them, and diffuse the results to each of the Association's member organizations. This closely parallels the Association's initial proposal that "...a cooperative effort of social scientists and field-oriented partners be undertaken to study schools as an experimental proposition."

In The Bases for Decision Making and Planned Change, Hock, Kean, and Smith articulated six components of the decision process. These components are (1) awareness, (2) intelligence, (3) design, (4) choice, (5) implementation, and (6) reflection. In order to avoid the often repeated developer's mistake of re-inventing the wheel, it should be noted that the awareness stage (cognizance of the existence of a basic uneasiness about a system) and the intelligence stage (identification of the known parameters of a problem and its context) have been completed on the macro (Association) level. These two stages, similar to what Stufflebeam calls "Context Evaluation" need to be documented on the micro (member organization) level to establish raison d'etre for each member's participation. This should be able to be accomplished, however, by simply collecting local data, and ascertaining that the data and the local agency's willingness to deal with the problem(s) it reflects relate to the purpose of the Association. It must be assumed that each prospective member organization will be ready to embark upon the design component when the Association does.

BUILDING THE DESIGN

The approach to the development of an evaluation design for the Association is immediately blocked by one major obstacle: the design must provide information useable both locally and internationally. As such, the design must speak to the specific needs of decision makers in each participating member organization as well as it having to produce information in a form which will enable it to be shared with all other member organizations and be comparable with their data bases. Critical to this is the development of the Association's minimum data requirements and the delineation of overall information needs.

Though, as stated in the previous section, each member organization will have already "defined" its system prior to the decision to participate in the Association, it may be necessary to go back and restate the data in a universally useable form and format. The Association must first decide about which key descriptors it will need data. In addition to defining these key descriptors, agreement must also be reached upon evaluation policies and basic evaluation assumptions. However, perhaps most critical to the delineation of information needs is the advance specification of those decisions for which data must be collected.

Once the information needs have been delineated, a plan for obtaining the necessary data must be put into practice. Such a plan should include methods for collecting, organizing, and analyzing the data on both the local and the international levels. Certain facets of local preparation, aggregation, and reduction of data will have to be controlled if the problems related to the Association's analysis of the data are to be kept to a minimum.

Finally, a plan for reporting the results must be developed. Such a plan should take into consideration the frequency, composition, and process of issuing local reports; the dissemination of local reports to other member organizations; public dissemination policies; the use of information for obtaining development funds; and an international timeline for process, interim product, and terminal product dissemination.

THE OBJECTIVE OF AN EVALUATION

Before proceeding any further, it might be appropriate to consider the general objective of such an evaluation -- that is, what should the evaluation accomplish? Evaluation has already been defined, as has its relationship to the decision maker. What have yet to be examined, however, are the types of decisions for which evaluation data should be provided. Stufflebeam suggests that four broad types of decisions exist: planning, structuring, implementing, and recycling; so it might be stated that the general objective of an evaluation is to provide sufficient information to allow for the best possible decisions of each type to be made.

The Association is past the embryonic stage; its shapers have labored long and hard in developing the blueprint for its existence. For this reason, it is contended that an evaluation, albeit informal, has been on-going; and further that this evaluation has provided useful data for making planning decisions, for the Association's objectives have been clearly stated. Still to be dealt with in formulating an evaluation strategy is the provision of information for structuring decisions, for the design of procedures; and recycling decisions, to react to or judge the results.

In providing for these types of decisions, the evaluation should produce both the descriptive and judgmental data described by Stake in his "Countenance Model." Though the use of judgmental data might be several years away, it will be a particularly crucial point in the life of the Association and should be planned for carefully, Recycling

decisions might be made as a result of judgments based upon either relative or absolute comparisons, on the local or international levels. As such, the evaluation must provide not only data capable of documenting the procedures and describing their implementation, but data which will serve as a yardstick in determining the very viability of the concept of experimenting schools.

AREAS TO BE EVALUATED, QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

About which areas must data be generated and what specific questions are to be answered? Though the response to these concerns will surely vary from member organization to member organization, the very reason for founding the Association requires it to develop a single definitive set of questions for use with all member organizations. However, until such a set of questions has been delineated, (and it should be considered a primary task), the proposal itself may be used to help focus upon areas of concern.

For example, the Association's notion of the school as an experimental proposition depends upon six stated conditions being present in each organizational unit:

1. A capacity to specify and agree upon the goals or criterion selected
2. A capacity to pose alternative ways in which the goals can be achieved
3. A capacity to identify and agree upon means for judging the degree of achievement of the goals
4. A capacity to accept the possibility of failure of any alternative means tested
5. A capacity to search for successful means of attaining the goals
6. A capacity or attitude and expectation of adaptability to insure continuous institutional renewal.

How one determines whether the above six capacities are present in each organizational unit has yet to be decided. The fact remains, however, that it will be necessary to provide data describing the context of each unit (member organization) from which one might easily ascertain the existence of those capacities.

Student output descriptors appear in the proposal in greater profusion and more succintly stated than any other type. From these descriptors, behavioral objectives might be generated, and questions related to those objectives, in turn, developed. For example, it is stated that "all persons who would live effectively in modernizing societies have certain capacities:"

1. Openness to experience and adaptability
2. Self-identity
3. Literacy and numerancy
4. Ability to relate to others
5. Ability to define and solve problems
6. Ability to contribute to the community
7. Ability to learn readily
8. Ability to use cognitive processes

Since the idea of a person living effectively in a modernizing society is central to the mission of the Association, it will be necessary to evaluate students and student-related processes to determine when, why, and to what degree they gain those abilities.

Other student output descriptors are mentioned for self-development and for coping. For self-development, each student needs the capacity (1) to be aware or to sense, (2) to understand and comprehend, and (3) to engage the environment. In order to cope, an individual is said to require (1) self-awareness, (2) values, (3) a repertoire of behaviors, (4) the capacity to predict, (5) self-discipline, and (6) the capacity for social interaction.

It is proposed that along with self-development and the coping capacity, comes a reduction in the incidence of human failure.

Specifically, individuals would be less subject (1) to the failure syndrome associated with schooling, (2) to mental illness, (3) to isolation and anomie, (4) to fatalism, and (5) to anit-social behavior.

If data about these descriptors are truly important, they must be so stated and methods for collecting and measuring such information must be developed.

THE GREAT INSTRUMENTATION COP-OUT

Perhaps the most frequently used and often abused reason for not bothering to provide for the evaluation of alternative schools is related to instrumentation. Much of the blame for this, however, should be placed squarely on the shoulders of the educational research and evaluation community. The insistence that evaluation equals measurement, and that unless a program can be measured with "hard" (direct) instruments, it is "no good," have caused many alternative school directors to avoid contact with so-called evaluators at all costs. In a position paper, Rosen has stated that "In one recent case, an alternative school's goals were collected and then 'revised' to fit available instrumentation, and it is my impression that this is not an uncommon practice."

There are a number of instrument-related reasons for not evaluating often cited, which, if examined closely, can be countered. For example, the emphasis on the use of behavioral objectives has led certain individuals to view evaluation only in terms of product assessment, and this, complains many project directors, fails to meet their needs because they are not merely interested in what happened, but also in how it occurred. However, total reliance upon evaluation of output is quite unnecessary, since most basic evaluation models provide for what Stufflebeam calls process evaluation, or what Provus calls operation evaluation and interim product evaluation. This process of monitoring what is happening while it is happening and determining why it is happening, is a prime ingredient in the operation and management of any program.

Another common complaint is that only highly trained specialists can evaluate alternative programs, and that such specialists are either

not available or too expensive. Maybe highly trained evaluation specialists are needed to design a suitable evaluation, but even at the design stage they must work closely with program personnel. The most labor-intensive (and, therefore, most expensive) part of many evaluation designs is the process or monitoring stage(s). Often a majority of the responsibilities associated with this stage can be carried out by project personnel, including teachers and students. It is generally sufficient for an evaluator to supervise the collection of data, using available resources to actually complete the process.

The unavailability of specific evaluation instruments should not be seen as a reason why to avoid evaluating a program. Often, combinations of existing instruments can be tailored to do the job. Just as often, however, upon checking the most recent literature, one may find mention made of useful new affective measures or culture-fair tests. Criterion referenced measures may also prove valuable.

This raises the spectre of standardized or norm-referenced tests as the only "valid" measure of pupil growth. The fear of total reliance upon standardized tests has driven many alternative school directors to the opposite extreme--the belief that no standardized instrument can ever be of use--which is just as futile a position. Both "hard" and "soft" data play a role in the evaluation of alternative programs. As Hickey has stated, "We must accept the fact that indirect measures become as important to evaluation and program improvement as conventional direct ones." One type of measure should not be "played-off" against the other, however.

NEXT STEPS

Whether an International Association of Experimenting Schools for Adolescents is to be established is no longer a question. At a meeting held in Philadelphia on September 15, 1973 it became a reality. Since that time, a half-dozen European nations have expressed an interest in joining the founding American, Canadian, and Israeli school organizations in their pursuit of solutions to a variety of basic social issues. What remains to be determined, however, is whether the Association can serve as a catalyst for educational development in each of its member organizations. The design and installation of a strong but flexible evaluation system is fundamental to monitoring the growth of each member organization, focusing and refocusing parts of each plan, and sharing successes and failures in this international endeavor.

If the evaluation system is to realize its potential it must

1. Be designed prior to the formal start of the experiment.
2. Be acceptable to each member organization.
3. Provide decision data useful at all organizational (structural) levels, from the individual to the Association.
4. Provide decision data useful for the self-development of individuals at each personal (participant) level, including students, teachers, parents, administrators, and planners.
5. Provide for the internal self improvement of each local organization.
6. Provide decision data useful in comparing local experiences from the broader, international frame of reference.
7. Provide sufficient data both "hard" and "soft," to convince all of the program's "publics" that it deserves continuing support.

8. Document the process of development of each member organization.

9. Provide for the development and/or selection of appropriate measurement devices of instrumentation to be used during each phase of the evaluation, including the monitoring of the process

10. Provide for the development of a dissemination system for use at all levels.

11. Be supported, philosophically and financially throughout the life of the experiment.

12. Be subject to refocusing or revision as a result of periodic audits using such criteria as reliability, objectivity, internal and external validity, relevance, significance, scope, credibility, timeliness, and pervasiveness.

This paper has attempted to suggest some of the problems and examine some of the processes inherent in the development of an evaluation system for an International Association of Experimenting Schools. Much of what has been articulated here, however, will apply to any true alternative school or program. No matter what the scope or how many levels may be involved, the provision of information upon which to make decisions is central to the success of any such endeavor.

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